

2nd Kallar Youth Conference.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

OF

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2nd KALLAR YOUTH CONFERENCE.

Dear Brethren,

I feel unable to give expression in words to my gratitude to you for the great honour which you have conferred on me in having selected me for this great post of President of the Kallar Youth Conference which begins its work from this morning and will close to-night. But I can scarcely conceal any misgivings at the thought of my unworthiness for this responsible job in view of the fact that there are in your city and in this flourishing District brilliant men, men of status and ability who could discharge this duty with remarkable aptitude. Passion for the uplift of my community I have got of course in abundance. I showed enough of it, as my Tanjore brethren knew, who attended the Mukkulathor Conference in Madras, in December, 1933 and you who are assembled here to-day will also realise that when you consider what it seems to have been which has induced me to cross over 1000 miles of sea and come over here despite many impediments. But I wonder whether I have got the ability for the discharge, in a special manner, of work of the President of the Kallar Youth Conference which holds its second session in this historic city of Tanjore. I hope however that all my gaps in this respect will be filled up by my keen desire to serve you and to put under your disposal what little lies in my limited power, to make what use you can for the cause of our advancement.

Let me address myself to my task. In the first place, I would like to remove a small misconception—in other words I would like to answer a question. The question is that—does not this conference show a sectional spirit, a spirit of sectarianism especially at a time such as this when the unifying spirit is at large, spirit of all section of Indian Communities merging into one viz., an all-India unit so to speak for the emancipation of our country. The question is a reasonable one. But in our case it can be met with quite a reasonable answer. The answer is this :—The variously ramified sections of the Indian

communities do not at this moment stand in the same level in the great race before us. Each has got its own individual handicaps. Hence arises, obviously, the necessity of a kind of sectional "falling in" (to use a Military term) for the purpose of drilling themselves individually in order to co-operate more effectively in the progress of the country and thus join with the great tide of the common cause of the nation. Thus the Kallar Youth Conference is not to be construed in a sectarian sense as an isolated factor. On the other hand it is the undertaking of the vigorous youth of a certain portion of the country to qualify themselves socially, materially, economically and politically to serve their mother land with a greater aptitude than what they possess at the present moment.

It is with this creed as its basis, the Conference has formulated its plan and it is this creed which, if I am not mistaken, actuates many undertakings which though they might seem to look like at the first sight individual isolated efforts, yet on careful scrutiny reveal the greater object lying at the back-ground of national advancement of their country. Thus the seeds which this Conference will throw on the ground will be such as will eventually lead to a harvest which will first enrich the community as a preparatory measure to benefit later the cause of the country. Herein therefore lies the significance of this Conference. Hence it is that, though the Kallars form a part of the Mukkulathor, a Conference of Kallars does not mean that the object is to out-distance the Maravar and Agambadiar Brethren. In fact wherever we are, whether as Kallars or Maravars or Agambadiars, it lies within the region of practical politics that we meet sectionally or unitedly as Mukkulathors as we did in the Madras Conference of December 1933. Hence whenever we get fresh facilities to fore-gather as Kallars as a unit or as Maravars or as Agambadiars for purposes of Conference the attempt is to be applauded as a well-come one for the uplift of the Mukkulathor. For instance, there is to be conducted, if I am not mistaken, the Appanad Maravar Conference. The object is the same. The fact that the Kallar Community bulks largely in Tanjore District is reason sufficient for the holding of the Youth Conference to-day.

The significant message of this Conference to the outside world is this :—Viz., the Kallar Youth to-day is animated as never before with the feeling to work first for the uplift of that circle whose name he bears ; and this circle he hopes to enlarge in an ever widening manner for the purpose of the larger cause of his mother country. Gentlemen, this is a reasonable aspiration and coming as it does at the present moment, when India as a whole is on the tip-toe of expectation for larger boons of Self Government, it possesses a value which can scarcely be over estimated. You will join with me therefore in this rising spirit of our youths in Tanjore which has given shape to this Conference. Our hearty congratulations should therefore go to Mr. S. Swayamprakasam, B. A., B. L., Advocate the capable leader of the Kallar Youths of Tanjore, whose infinite capacity for taking pains has been pervading the whole atmosphere of this Conference in a remarkable manner.

Perhaps some of you may expect to hear from me something about the illustrious origin of the word Kallar and ask me whether it is not a misnomer to interpret the word Kalla to mean a robber. I must frankly tell you that in this respect I have nothing new or original to offer you by way of explanation. The final announcement of a dogmatic character with regard to the origin of the term is yet to come. A few have already approached the subject in the light of research work. Our opinion is that the Kallars were in origin a part of the Chola race. The explanation for this is that the word Chola was given an unfortunate twist as Sora and hence arose an evil odour even after. Some cite instances of the invasion of Kalinga by Karnagara Thondaman who was both Commander-in-Chief and King. Other instances are also given of Vanni Servai, Sinna Marudu and Peria Marudu as per the statement of Mr. Sivakolundu Mudaliar, Retired Tahsildar of Tanjore in his short brochure on Kallars. The States of Ramnad, Pudukottai and the Principality of Papanad have played no little part in the palmy days of the Kings of Chola time, and other notables. For my part I would rather take interest not so much in the pride of pedigree than as in the more practical work of plunging into the living presence and get what we can out of it. Speculation from given data is a cheerful work for the philosophic historian. But to us men of the work-a-day

would what matters is, what we see and not what we could guess. So Gentlemen, what do we see? What is the position of the Kallars as a community at the present moment. According to the later census the Kallar population of the three Districts of Tanjore, Trichinopoly and Madura is 5,10,000 of which 2,45,000 are males and 2,65,000 are females. Out of this number we gather from the same census that those who know how to read and write Tamil only are 17,062 among men and 1,650 among women. Out of this again those who know English is 1968 men and 75 women. From these figures we have got to conclude that among us those who know to read and write Tamil are 96 out of 1000. Those who know to read and write English among our population is in the proportion of 3 to 1000. Now I need hardly tell you that this examination reflects a very sorry state of things with regard to education in our community. I ask on whose shoulders lies the blame for this slovenly progress of education. Gentlemen, it is very easy to blame but nothing is so difficult to prove our charge. There are two people who are responsible for our education—the one is Government and the other is Zamindars under whose jurisdiction live hundreds of souls whose education must be carefully looked after. Now with regard to the officers of Government their work is enmeshed in Red Tape. So much so that they bungle hopelessly unless they are given the required help in the way of being posted with the genuine facts and figures which they require while tackling our subject. This is a very important factor which determines our welfare. Government goes by the index of public opinion and they dare not go against it unless they are determined to face the consequences. Let us take for instance the hostel for our children which the Government were running for a number of years. The Government gave due regard, as in duty bound, to public opinion and gave its due share of help. Now what has happened? It is distressing to see that the Government are dismantling the hostel and the result will be that hundred pupils will have to wander as waves so to speak without any hope of education. Now as far as the Government is concerned this looks to be the unkindest cut of all. This looks all the more so now when the cry for education fills the air. To what shall I put down this sudden cooling down of the Government warmth! There must be some-

thing somewhere. Shall I say that of late the force of public opinion among us has not been much in evidence, the consequence being the Government suddenly shutting its doors on our pupils. This is a serious situation. It is up to us now to take such steps as are immediately necessary to convince the authorities as to the necessity of the undoing the evil which has resulted from their action. It ought to be our work to take action cumulatively in respect of this menace. I hope it will be one of the resolutions of this evening. Let me give the warning to the youth of our community to day viz., that education is a plank in which we stand as a body politic. Without education we are nowhere. On you lies the task of removing this stigma and efface from the records the dismal figure, which I gave just now, of the state of our education. On you lies the duty to agitate and agitate intelligently in this regard and besiege the Government as well as the Zamindars in this connection. Our village education will be hopeless unless they get the active interest of the Zamindars and landlords. From Russia as well as Japan comes the latest news that vigorous rural education in these countries has resulted in their remarkable achievements of double yield in harvests and pasture. It is not without meaning that a great man once said at the touch of educated hand mud-earth becomes gold. We want more schools and more and more of them for our boys. We want a special plan for the education of our girls. Shall we succeed or shall we not? I put you this question. This is a vital question and from you the answer must come. This is not an easy work fit to be dismissed after academic discussion. It demands patience, it demands an organisation of power and prestige. These demands you can and must fulfil. I have strong hopes and I strongly hope they will not be in vain. While I am at this, I will be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge publicly on your behalf the great help rendered by such persons as Rao Bahadur Rajappa, Zamindar of Papanad and Mr. Vandayar of Poondi, who are so to speak treasures of this District whose value is great in matters of uplift of our community. May their work be infectious with other big folk land lords and others who hold in their hands the key of the progress of that community. I speak with so much stress on education because it is by its light must disappear all the

mists which cover our path such as our social and other disabilities. They are manifold indeed. They cover marriage expenditure and wastes involved by indiscriminate waste of money on these occasions. It is more or less ignorance which makes poorer men among us, ape bigger folk in marriage ceremonies and for this purpose they are obliged even to sell their lands and get into debts. Youth of our community, I appeal to you, that this subject to be another charge on your plan of work. Do not rest until you have done something by your efforts to eradicate this evil. There is likewise the urgent need of encouragement of widow marriage. *The wail of young widows is an evil omen for a nation.* Beware of this. This must form an important item in your campaign of work. You must also remember that at the pace in which the nations of the world are progressing we must make an introspective inspection of our social customs in this respect. Do not flinch or forget. The days demand of you a vigorous attitude in this respect. The best aid in this line for you is to educate the women of your own house and instill the refinement which is demanded of them if we are to keep in line with the other communities. Remember this golden maxim:—*The best of nations owe their best to their women.* There are two other evils to which likewise you must give your attention. They are litigation and drink. Litigation in our Districts is a rampant evil. Over 80 per cent of litigation here, is, I understand from the Kallars. It is on you, youth of the country, lies my hope to turn your eyes to this evil. Litigation is bound to sap absolutely the economic energy of any community. Our work in this line should take the shape of such bands of organisation as litigation prevention union and re-introduction of effective Panchayat system. With regard to the drink evil in the villages let me say that it is the potent source of crime of all kinds. It behoves us, in this respect to launch ante-drink campaign and discourage by means of pamphlets and speeches our people from falling a prey to the drink evil and misery which follows in its trail. The work which you must do in this matter is of course fraught with difficulties, but gentlemen, the *determination of youth* is proverbial and I am sure the Kalla youths above all youths in the world is bound to conquer. Great and momentous as are your duties in the matters I have

already mentioned greater still lies on your head a serious responsibility—a responsibility on which depends the honour of your community—the responsibility I say which if assessed in its proper perspective will not allow you a night's rest unless and until you have met with success. I mean the responsibility before you of removing the stigma that is keenly felt by every member of our community, as a respecting man or woman, the stigma of having the name of his nationality besmirched before the eyes of God and man. I mean the stigma of several tracts occupied by our community being classified by the Government under the dubious category of the criminal tribes. The Criminal Tribes Act which was in a fair way of gradual removal from the statute book is, if I am not mistaken, unexpectedly being pushed to the fore with an insistence which is sinister to a degree. What looks to be very comical in this connection is that the powers that be have only recently announced the necessity of stopping reclamation work in the areas concerned as in their opinion things have improved so much that there is no necessity to continue reclamation. That in the same breath however they are blowing hot and cold is shown by their anomalous behaviour in extending the operation of Criminal Tribes Act into fresher areas instead of putting a full stop to this unhealthy ruling. Youth of our community, I need not expatiate much on your duty in this matter on which depends the honour of your community. It is to you that the 5 lakhs of our people look up pathetically for the removal of this deep stigma which prevents them from holding their heads equally with the self-respecting people of the world. It is an irony of fate that a community which counts among its fold Princes and Zamindars and mirasdars and vakils, Police Officials and Deputy Collectors and Professors of Colleges should still bend its head in shame with brand of Cain. I ask you to-day, do you not feel for the name of the community? Do you not hold yourself a self respecting gentleman? Do you tolerate for one moment the dire uses to which the Criminal Tribes Act is put in the areas in question. I feel sure you will agree with me that it is high time that we banded ourselves together and agitate in a constitutional manner convincing the powers that be the ante diluvian character of this

Draconian legislation and removing it once for all from the statute book. This requires a powerful combination of forces in our community. This demands a powerful committee of influential men who shall inspect the whole situation in regard to this matter and draw out a report in all its details and submit the same to the Government without leaving a loop-whole whatever for the powers that be to put their finger of blame. Gentlemen, from to-day onwards this ought to be the fervent vow of every youth of this land that he will never rest until this stigma is removed. I do not appeal to older people. They have done their best. I appeal to you - you who form the life blood of our community. I do hope that my appeal will not be a cry in the wilderness. I do admit that the path in this respect is strewn with difficulties but to you these very difficulties must be incentives to further action. Remember this then, that to-day you are putting your vigorous foot forward in this great task of redeeming the honour of your nation and that on no account you will draw it backward. I say this because discouragement is a thing which is a ready made article free of sale with respect to all national undertakings. But the men who really feel their duty are those who cry that it is *discouraging* word which gives further incentive to a really genuine leader of men. Mark the above words then and march forward. Do not flinch. Do not flay. It is on your flag above all the rest, the word 'Excelcior' should be inscribed. Glance for a moment at the inscrutable verdict of history from earliest times up to-day with regard to youths' march in the transformation of the world. It is the youth of the world who founded kingdoms and conquered the earth. Look at Chandragupta, look at Alexander, look at Napoleon, later look at Hitler on the crack of whose thumb, the youth of Germany will be up in arms in a moment. It is youthful Antony Eden who is now pouring so adroitly oil in the troubled waters of world's international politics. *Youth to arms* that is the cry which is resounding in every corner of the earth from north to south and east to west. And I cry to-day to the youths of our community—youth of my nation—take up arms. Come out in troops to raise your community to the level of the self respecting communities of the world. 60 years ago in Japan wolves and jackals were howling in places where now roars the wheels of

industry and commerce. Which was the force which within half a century pulled up the country to the present glorious standard. It was the youth of the nation. History tells it. The modern Turkey the envy of the world is the hand-work of the young Turks who have left a name in history. The main stay of the great honours of Russia and Italy are again the youth of the country. So I cry once more and vehemently youth of our community to arms. But there is one thing in which the Government should stand by us and it is this. They must recognise that we are still left in the back ward in regard to progress. We have been a neglected factor. We had in years past, lost our identity in the jostling of our community so much so it was long considered (even now it is so in many cases) a stigma to call yourself a member of the Kalla community. Shakespear's practical philosophy defining a name in the famous lines

What is in a name ?

That which we call E. rose

by any other name would smell as sweet

has had no practical value in face of the threatening consequences involved in the very mention of the word *Kalla*. Times have changed however and light of sectional spirit has dispelled all fallacies. Today the Kalla is not ashamed of his community. On the other hand the enlightened leaders feel their duty to help their community forward. It is at this psychological moment that I put up before the Government their own share of duty by lending likewise their helping hand. A great responsibility lies upon them in this direction. It is their duty to announce as unambiguously as possible to treat our community as a backward class in special need of Government protection. It should be their policy to up lift this backward class by means of special avenues in case of appointments, promotions and in case of scholarships, and other kindred helps. This is a stage at which the community needs a lift so that later on it may stand on its own legs, so as to help the administration on all its lines of constitutional progress. The new reforms need it. And it is this opportunity which Government must take hold of as protectors of the weak.

In this matter as well as in the others which I have now put up before you it is the youth who must now tuck up their sleeves to plough their furrow. Our community wants the parental protection of the powers that be and the day is soon to come when the Government themselves will realise that ingratitude is a word which is never found in the dictionary of our race.

I have come to the end but the beginning of the end is once more the same ardent and anxious cry—*youth of our community to arms*. Come out and take your people to the promised land where your nation will hold its head among the self-respecting communities of the world.

